

THE MAINE FIRE INCIDENT REPORTING SYSTEM

“FIGHTING FIRE WITH FACTS”

MEFIRS – AN OVERVIEW

The Maine Fire Incident Reporting System is an information and data gathering system initiated and supported by the Office of State Fire Marshal. The goal of the Maine Fire Incident Reporting System, or MEFIRS, is to encourage the use of a standardized incident reporting system as a means of addressing the State's fire problem and related emergency services issues. Through its use, the Maine Fire Incident Reporting System can play a major role in reducing injuries, fatalities, and economic losses from fire and related emergencies by facilitating the collection, compilation, analysis, and use of data to produce and disseminate the information needed by decision makers. Maine statute, Title 25 MRSA § 2395, requires that Fire Chiefs report all facts relating to the cause, origin and circumstances of fires occurring within their jurisdictions.

As the collection and use of accurate incident data is critical to the decision making process for identification of fire problems at local, state, and federal levels, the United States Fire Administration developed NFIRS as a means of assessing the nature and scope of the fire problem in the United States. The U.S. Fire Administration and the National Fire Information Council jointly manage NFIRS. NFIC is a users' group comprised of state agencies and metropolitan fire departments that are responsible for fire data collection and analysis. In the State of Maine, the Office of State Fire Marshal functions as the states' fire service representative to the National Fire Information Council. The heart and sole of the system is the more than 14,000 fire departments, dispersed across the country, that participate and report their data to the National Fire Incident Reporting System.

After returning from an incident, fire departments make out the appropriate NFIRS reports. These reports are provided in an electronic computer software application within a fire and records management system. These standard NFIRS forms contain a core of information common to every state's reporting system. Local fire departments forward completed NFIRS form data, which are filled out by the computer based application, to the state agency responsible for NFIRS data. The Office of State Fire Marshal electronically submits data compiled from all participating jurisdictions to the U.S Fire Administration. Annual NFIRS data are used as the basis for the U.S. Fire Administration's publication "Fire In The United States", which is the single most comprehensive reference on the nature and scope of the fire problem in the United States.

STATE USES OF MEFIRS

Perhaps the most fundamental use of MEFIRS is in understanding the nature of the fire problem, whether conceived at the local, state, or national level. One indicator of the usefulness of the reporting system is its utilization by the State Fire Marshal's Office in the preparation of the annual report. This information that is gathered from local fire departments provides a resource of statistical data that can then be shared statewide to assist local fire chiefs in determining fire trends and specific areas of fire loss that may need to be addressed. The application of the Maine Fire Incident Reporting System provides the critical link to this data collection sharing.

LOCAL FIRE DEPARTMENT USES OF MEFIRS

Because of the number of departments that are using MEFIRS, it is difficult to document all of the ways that they are using the data. For departments, in the State of Maine, that rely heavily on MEFIRS for reporting fire statistics, an important advantage is that the local fire departments can compare their own productivity and effectiveness with the State average. They can also seek out statistics on fire departments in communities similar to their own and conduct comparisons. The rich resources available through the Maine Fire Incident Reporting System allow a local fire department to conduct many sophisticated analyses that include the identification of trends in the number of calls to the fire department, the types of calls made, and the origin of calls. This information might be used to determine the best location for a fire station. Data acquired can also provide justification of fire department budgets to the city or town council. The system will allow the fire department to count, for example, the number of brush fires to which it has responded, identify whether the trend is upward or downward, and then make an assessment as to whether the department has enough brush fire resources available to meet the demands for service. There is little doubt that MEFIRS has stimulated many local fire departments to use hard data for their fire protection management decision-making and to improve local fire service delivery.

THE FUTURE OF MEFIRS AND LOCAL FIRE DEPARTMENT USE

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